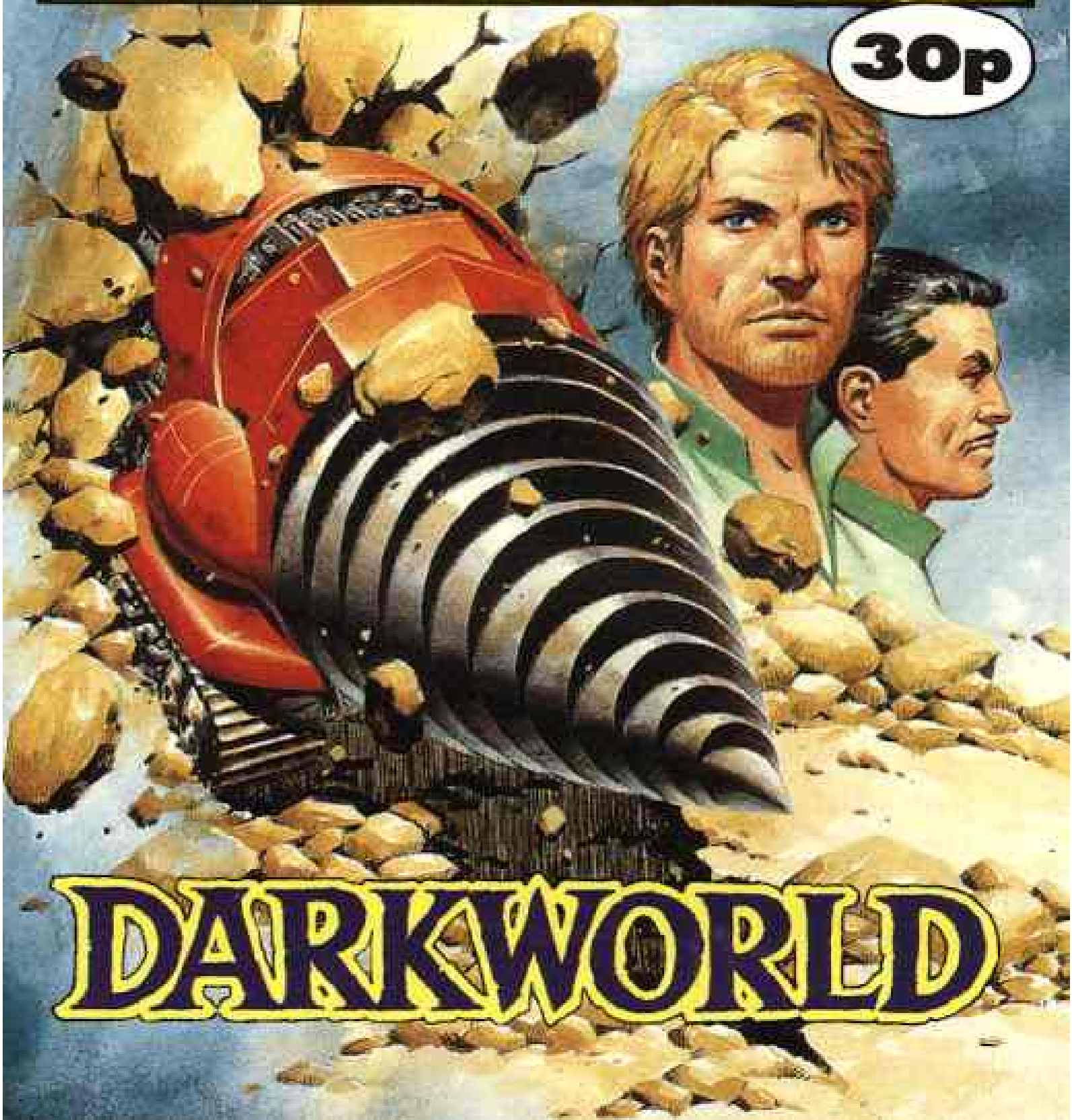
STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No. 234

30p



DARKWORLD

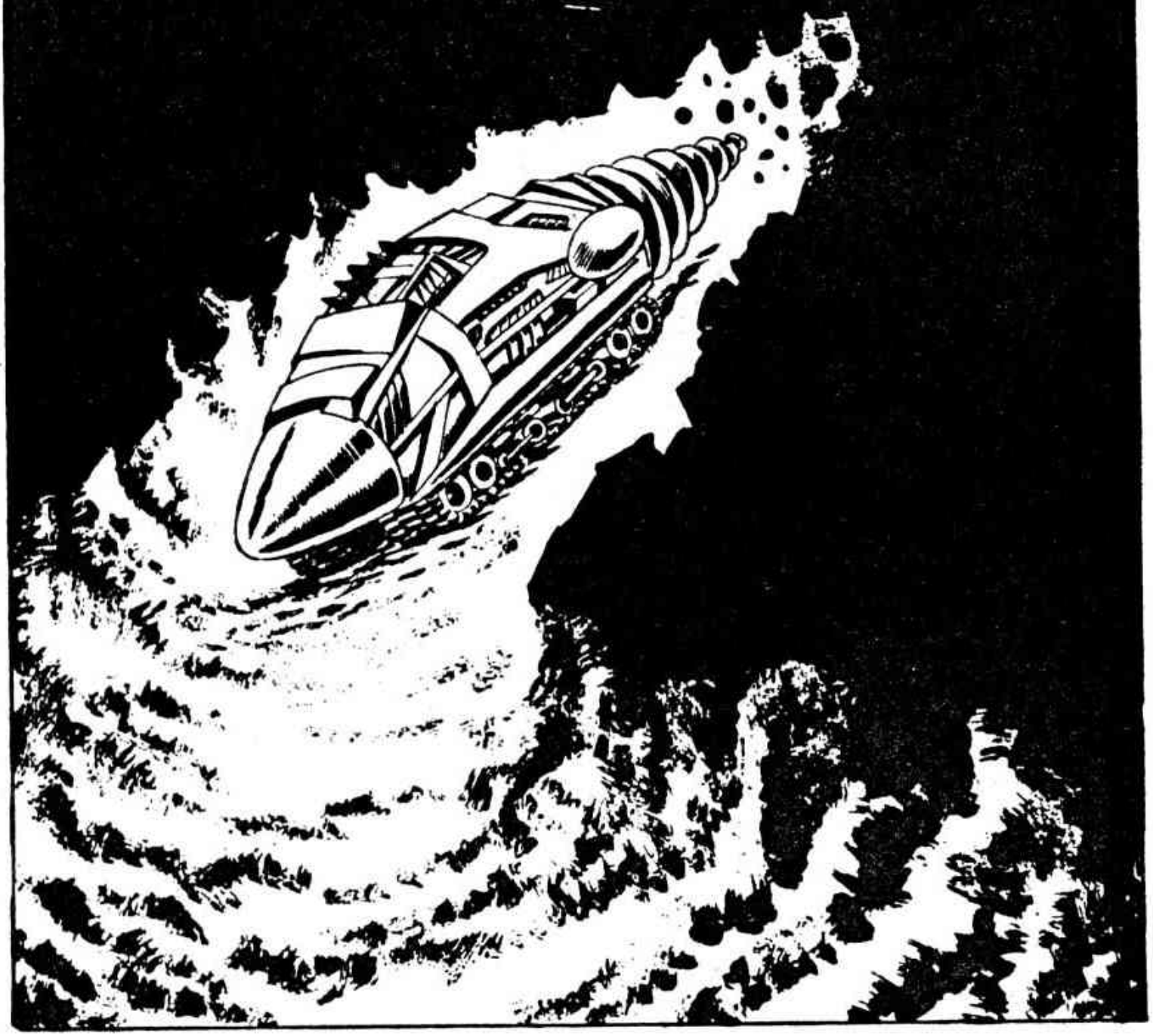
DON'T MISS

THIS MONTH'S OTHER ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURE

NOW ON SALE

DARKWORLD

DURING THE THERMAL WARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY, MAN RETREATED TO THE SAFETY OF SPECIALLY-CONSTRUCTED UNDERGROUND CITIES. HERE HE REMAINED, COCOONED IN ROCK, INSULATED FROM THE POST HOLOCAUST RADIATION. FIVE HUNDRED YEARS LATER . . .



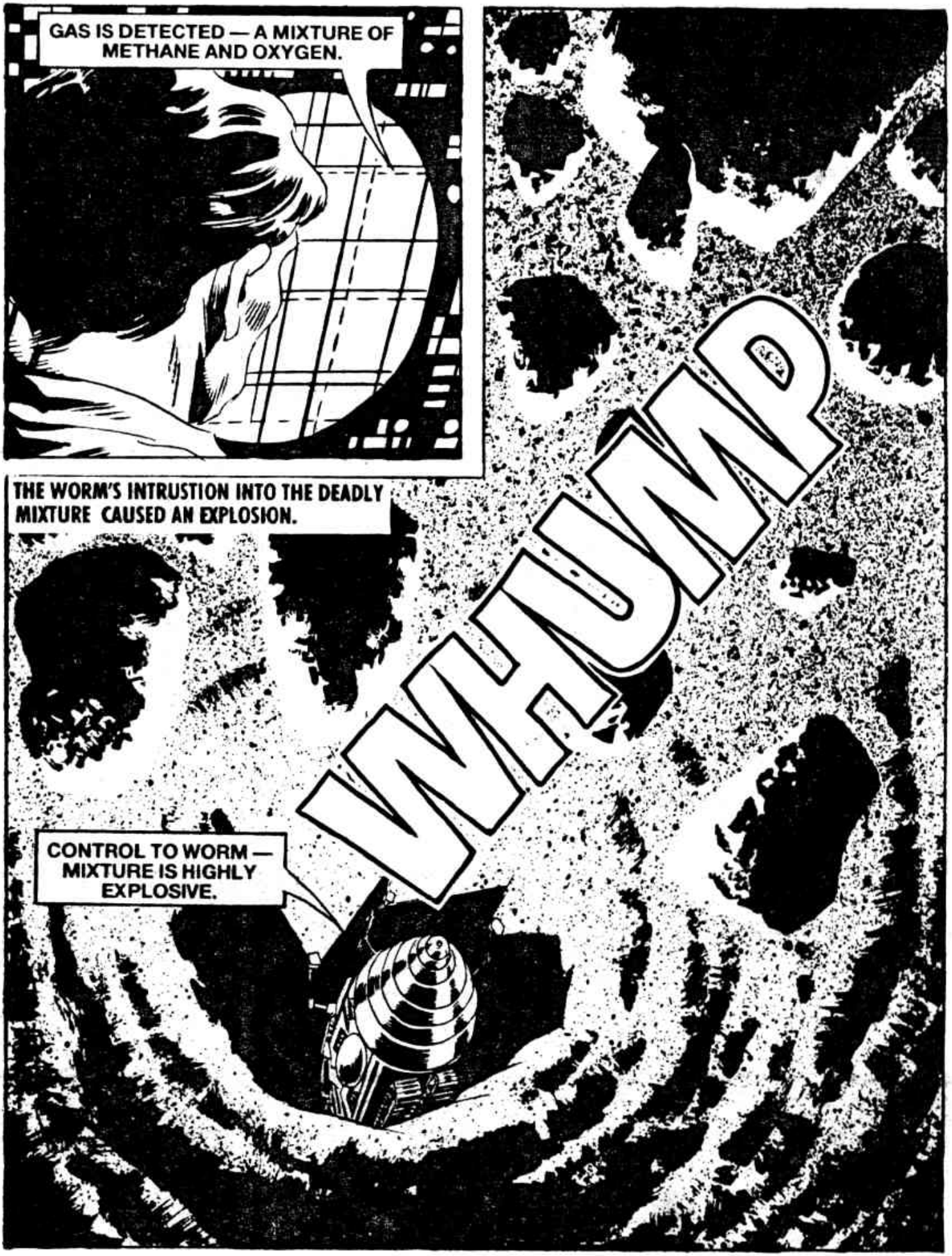
DEEP UNDERGROUND, TWO MEN IN A BORING WORM WERE SURVEYING FOR A NEW AREA TO BUILD—
WE'VE HIT SOFT ROCK . . . EASE BACK ON THE POWER, DORCAS.
REVS REDUCED, MINGO!

CUT POWER! THE ENGINE'S RUNNING WILD.

WE'RE BREAKING THROUGH INTO A CAVERN OF SOME SORT.

THIS STRATA CAN'T HAVE BEEN PROPERLY SOUNDED.THERE AREN'T MEANT TO BE ANY CAVITIES HERE.

CAVITY IS A LATERAL SHAFT ACROSS OUR COURSE. LOOKS LIKE A MACHINED EXCAVATION.
DETAIL NOTED.


GAS IS DETECTED — A MIXTURE OF METHANE AND OXYGEN.
WHUMP
THE WORM'S INTRUSTION INTO THE DEADLY MIXTURE CAUSED AN EXPLOSION.
CONTROL TO WORM — MIXTURE IS HIGHLY EXPLOSIVE.

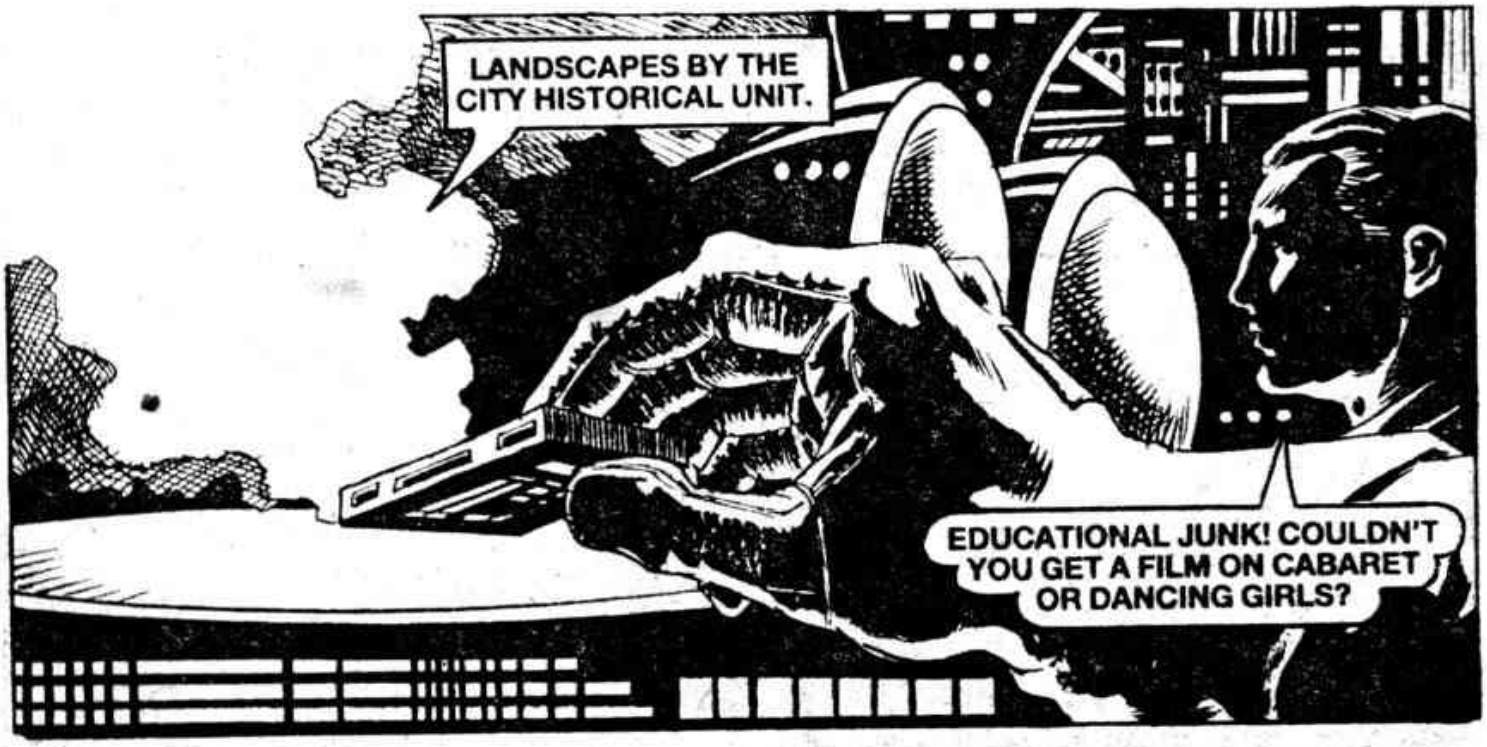
RADIO'S OUT . . TEST OTHER FUNCTIONS.

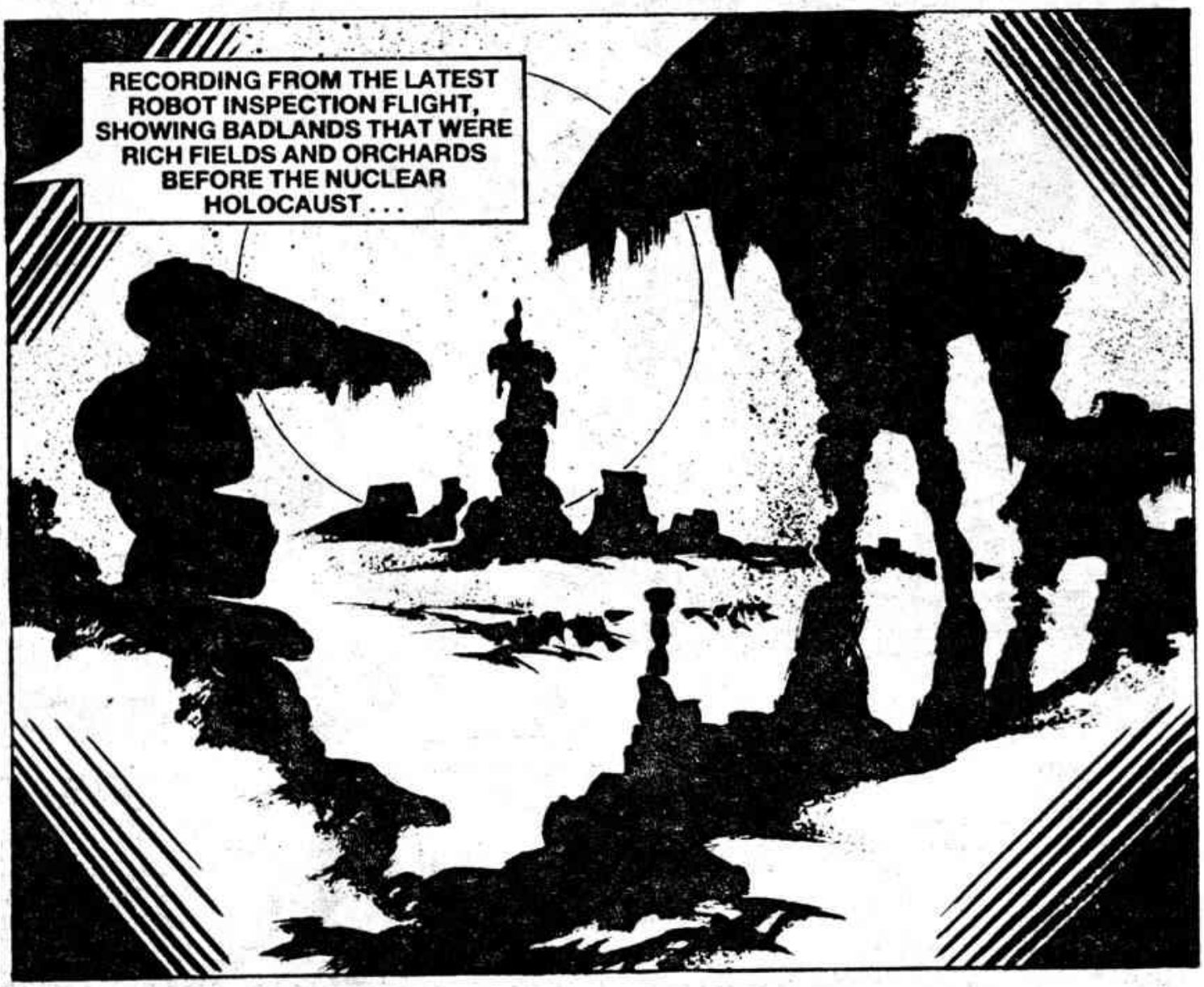
ROCK FALL AHEAD!

THE WORM CUT THROUGH THE ROCK FALL.

CUTTING NICELY!

SIR, SHOULDN'T WE BE BACKING OUT?
PROBABLY! BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ODD ABOUT THIS HOLE.
FOR A START, IT'S MAN-MADE.
THIS'LL BE A LONG JOB. TAKE A REST, LAD. I'LL WAKE YOU IF ANYTHING INTERESTING TURNS UP.
I'D RATHER WATCH MY VIDEO, SIR.


LANDSCAPES BY THE CITY HISTORICAL UNIT.
EDUCATIONAL JUNK! COULDN'T YOU GET A FILM ON CABARET OR DANCING GIRLS?


RECORDING FROM THE LATEST ROBOT INSPECTION FLIGHT, SHOWING BADLANDS THAT WERE RICH FIELDS AND ORCHARDS BEFORE THE NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST . . .

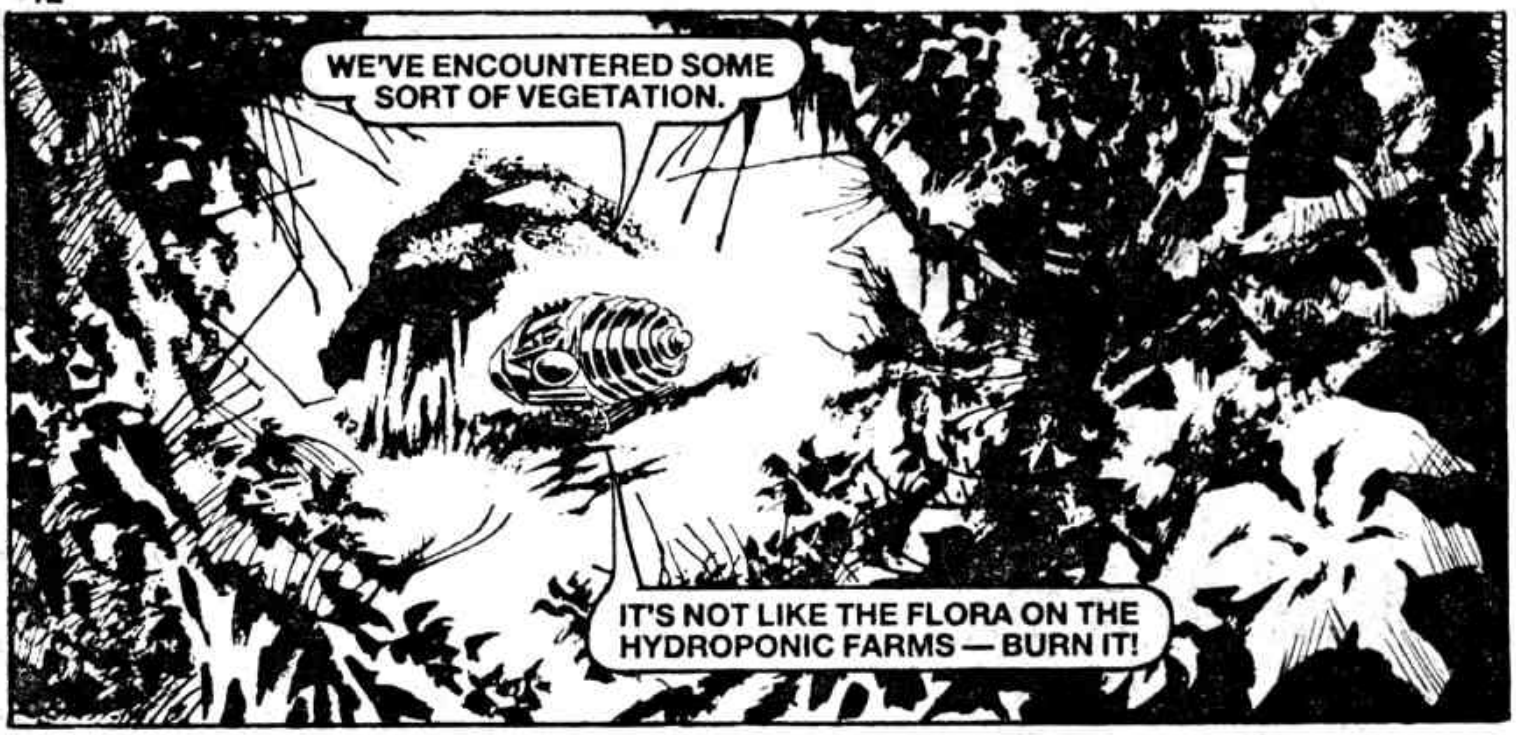
NOW THE RUINS OF A GREAT CITY, STILL RADIOACTIVE AFTER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS . . .

DORCAS — LOOK! WE'VE BROKEN THROUGH INTO AN OLD-TIME MINE WORKING.

A COAL DIGGING, DORCAS. THAT WAS A FOSSIL FUEL USED BEFORE FOLK KNEW HOW TO TAP MAGMA HEAT FROM THE EARTH'S CORE.
I DO KNOW THAT.

SIR, ISN'T TIME WE TURNED BACK?
DORCAS, STOP PESTERING ME. GO PLAY WITH YOUR VIDEO.

A LIGHT— UP AHEAD!
A STRANGE KIND OF LIGHT — IT'S NOT REAL!


WE'VE ENCOUNTERED SOME SORT OF VEGETATION.
IT'S NOT LIKE THE FLORA ON THE HYDROPONIC FARMS — BURN IT!

THE WORM MOVED IN BEHIND ITS THERMAL LANCE . . .

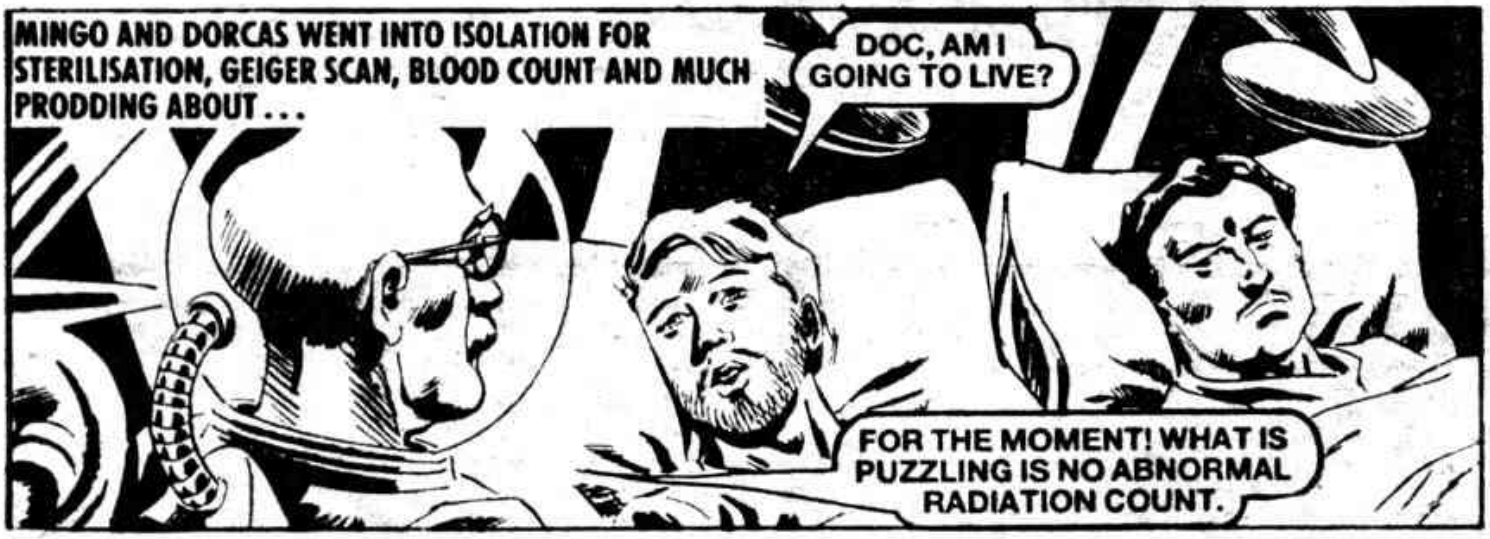
WE'RE BREAKING THROUGH. HEY, THAT LIGHT'S BRIGHT.
MINGO, DON'T YOU SEE WHERE WE ARE? WE'RE DEAD MEN.
WE'RE TOPSIDE— OUT ON THE CRUST!

A FLYING RAT!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.

THE WORM TURNED ABOUT AND PUT ON SPEED . . .

THEY SAY RADIATION MAKES YOUR HAIR FALL OUT, THEN YOUR TEETH—
SHUT UP!

THE WORM RETURNED TO BASE—
BASE TO PATHFINDER TEAM 932. AIRLOCK HATCH NOW OPEN.
WE ARE COMING IN. ADVISE THAT QUARANTINE FACILITY IS REQUIRED.


MINGO AND DORCAS WENT INTO ISOLATION FOR STERILISATION, GEIGER SCAN, BLOOD COUNT AND MUCH PRODDING ABOUT . . .
DOC, AM I GOING TO LIVE?
FOR THE MOMENT! WHAT IS PUZZLING IS NO ABNORMAL RADIATION COUNT.

MED-SECURITY HERE TO TAKE THE PATIENTS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION.
YES, I WAS NOTIFIED.

THE PATIENTS WERE DRIVEN THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF THE UNDERGROUND CITY . . .

TOP LEVEL! WOW! I'VE NEVER BEEN HIGHER THAN TENTH BEFORE.
MINGO, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SUCH RICH LIVING?
HUSH IT! I JUST HEARD OUR NAMES.
THE EXPLOSION COMPLETELY DESTROYED THE BODIES OF THE TWO WORKERS. A MEMORIAL SERVICE WILL BE HELD BY THE LABOUR CORPS. CLEAN-UP WORK IS PROCEEDING.
THAT'S US. THEY SAY WE'RE DEAD.

BE QUIET OR YOU WILL BE DEAD. ALL IT TAKES IS A JAB OF THIS.
MINGO AND DORCAS KEPT QUIET . . .
THE DEPUTY IS EXPECTING YOU.

DEAR WORKERS, I HEAR YOU HAD A MOST UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE. DID YOU FIND TOPSIDE SO VERY TERRIBLE?
SIR, YOU MAY FIND THIS HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT WE SAW VEGETATION — AND FLYING THINGS, TOO.
NO, I DO NOT FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE. TAKE THEM AWAY.
THE BEWILDERED PAIR WERE WHEELED INTO ANOTHER ELEVATOR . . .
GOING UP — ONLY IT ISN'T POSSIBLE. WE'RE ALREADY AT TOP LEVEL.

YOU TUNNEL MOLES ARE ON YOUR OWN NOW. SO GET UP AND WALK.
THINK YOURSELVES LUCKY. YOU COULD BE IN AN ORGAN TRANSPLANT LIBRARY.
LOOK! A HATCH OPENS.

TOPSIDE!
AHHH — MY EYES!

WHAT IS THAT LIGHT?
SUNLIGHT . . . NO! NO! OPEN UP — PLEASE.

HUH — WHAT?

GO AWAY! GO FAR! RUN! RUN! RUN!

LORD, THEY HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM THE MAIN PORTAL.
DEPUTY, I THANK YOU.

THEY GAINED SHELTER . . .
VEGETATION? HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?
AT LEAST IT SHIELDS US FROM THAT TERRIBLE OPEN SKY.

AH! SOME TYPE OF BEAST.
MORE LIFE TOPSIDE. THE IMPOSSIBLE IS BECOMING NORMAL.

EVEN IN WATER THERE IS LIFE. TOPSIDE SWARMS WITH LIFE.

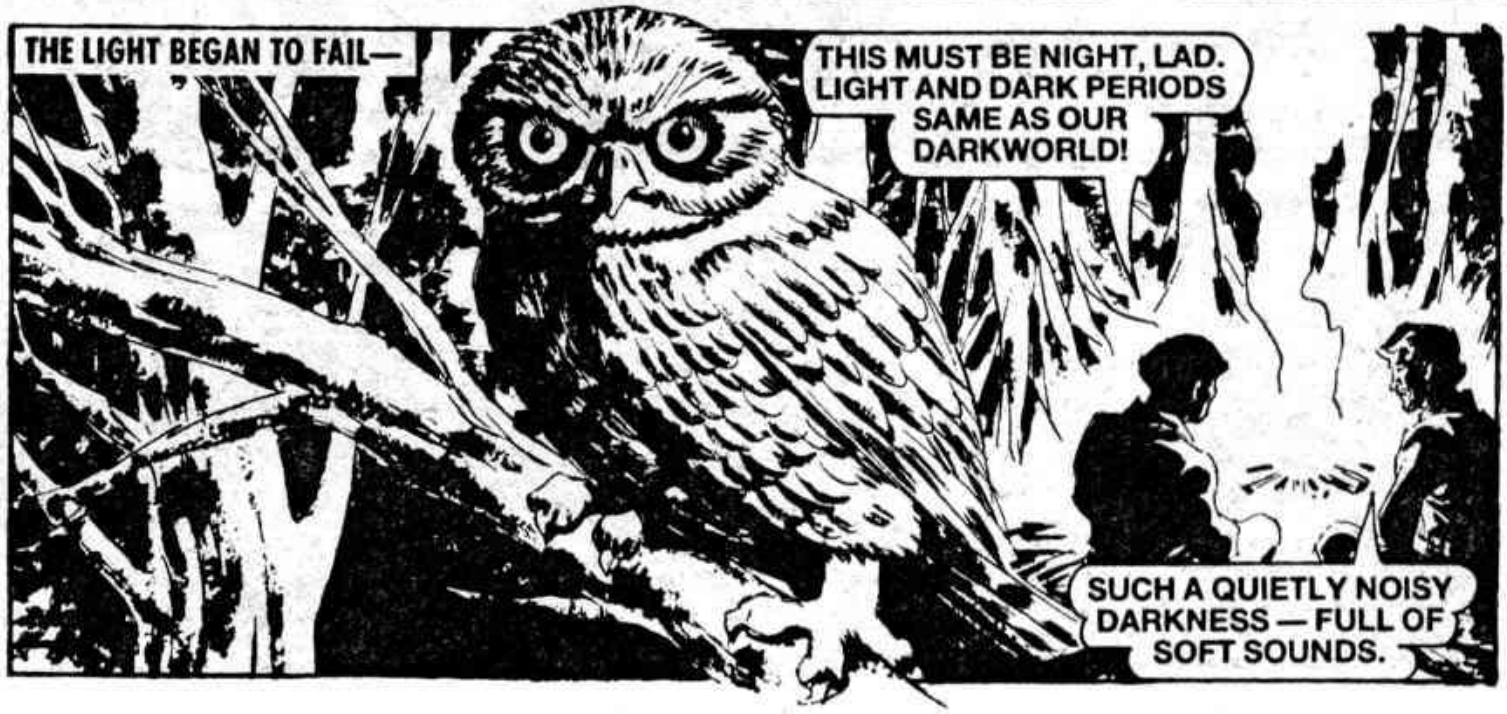
MINGO, YOU ARE DEAD IF YOU DRINK CONTAMINATED WATER.
I THINK NOT . . . I BELIEVE WE HAVE BEEN ABANDONED UP HERE BECAUSE OF WHAT WE DISCOVERED, TO REVEAL THAT TOPSIDE IS NOT CONTAMINATED WOULD REDUCE THE CREDIBILITY OF THE RULING BODY.

MINGO BEGAN ACTING ODDLY . . .

YOU CANNOT INTEND INGESTING THAT — THAT CARCASE FOR NUTRIENT!
IS IT NOT WHAT FOLK DID BEFORE LICHEN AND HYDROPONIC FARMS. LET ME HAVE YOUR VIDEO.

YET I DON'T FANCY IT RAW. SO GATHER ME KINDLING AND I'LL MAKE FLAME FROM THE CONDENSER CHIP.

AN HOUR PASSED . . .
A CURIOUS TASTE — RICH AND PLEASING.
PERHAPS I SHOULD TRY SOME.


THE LIGHT BEGAN TO FAIL—
THIS MUST BE NIGHT, LAD. LIGHT AND DARK PERIODS SAME AS OUR DARKWORLD!
SUCH A QUIETLY NOISY DARKNESS — FULL OF SOFT SOUNDS.

CAME DAWN AFTER AN UNEASY NIGHT . . .
I MUST BE GROWING USED TO THIS OPENNESS. YESTERDAY I KEPT THINKING I WAS ABOUT TO FALL OFF INTO THE SKY.
HUSH! LISTEN!

LOOK!

HUMAN LIFE! IT SEEMS TO BE COMING OUR WAY.
I'VE A FEELING WE'D BE SMART TO AVOID IT — AND THOSE BEASTS.

WE'LL CUT OFF TO A SIDE AND GO INTO HIDING WHILE THEY PASS.

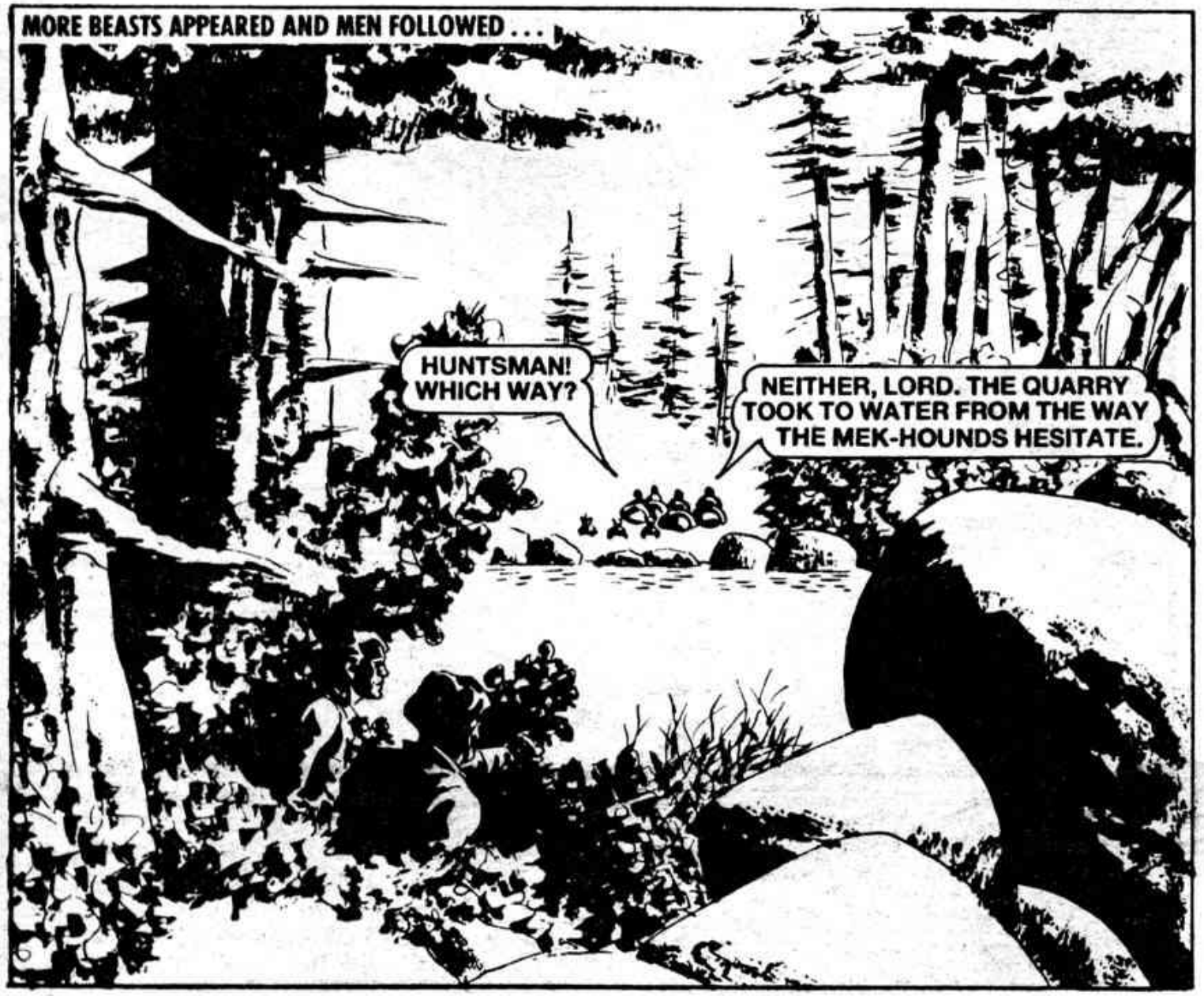
MINUTES LATER . . .
THEY AREN'T PASSING! THEY'VE TURNED AFTER US.

IT'S AS IF THOSE BEASTS CAN SENSE WHICH WAY WE GO.

MORE WATER! WHICH WAY DO WE TURN?
INTO THE WATER! THAT PUTS AN OBSTACLE IN THE WAY OF THOSE BEASTS.

IN WATER, MEN CHOKE. YOU'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN WHEN A SHAFT FLOODS.
BUT WOOD FLOATS!
YOU SEE! THE FLOW OF THE WATER WILL CARRY US.
WE GO TO THE OTHER SIDE.
IT MUST BE THE WAY OF THE FLOW BECAUSE OF THIS TURN IN ITS COURSE.

LOOK!
WE HIDE! HURRY!


MORE BEASTS APPEARED AND MEN FOLLOWED . . .
HUNTSMAN! WHICH WAY?
NEITHER, LORD. THE QUARRY TOOK TO WATER FROM THE WAY THE MEK-HOUNDS HESITATE.

SINCE NO DARKWORLDERS CAN SWIM, THE FOOLS MUST HAVE SWEPT AWAY AND DROWNED.
HUNTSMEN, TOMORROW YOU CAN COURSE BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER FOR SCENT OF THEM. MEANWHILE WE'LL FIND OTHER SPORT.

SO WE ARE SPORT OF MEN WHO HUNT WITH MECHANICAL DOG THAT FOLLOW BY SCENT.
LIVELY DOINGS FOR MEN THAT SHOULD BE DEAD OF RADIATION.

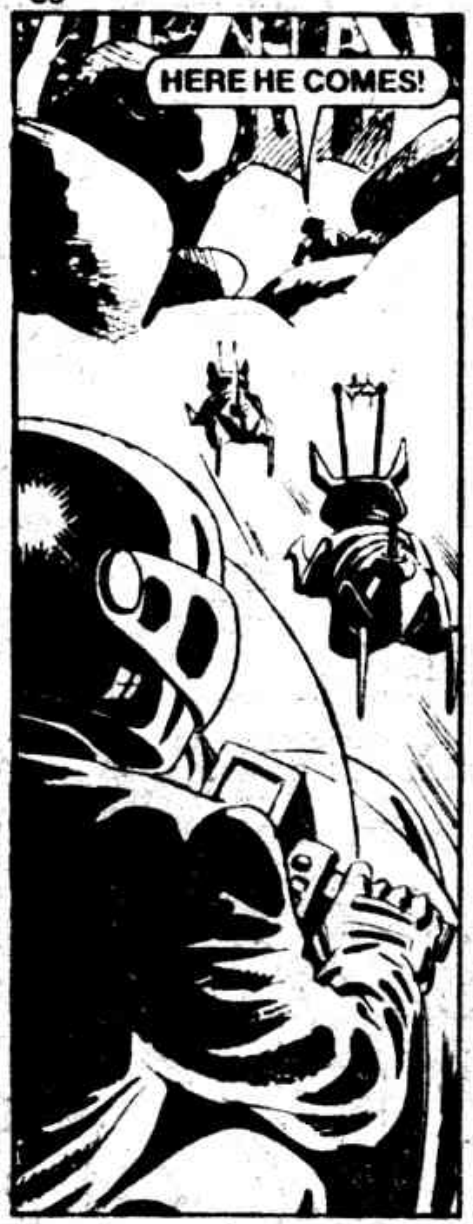
BETTER BE WELL AWAY FROM THIS RIVER WHEN THE HUNTSMAN COMES LOOKING FOR US TOMORROW.
DAY PASSED INTO ANOTHER UNEASY NIGHT THAT BECAME ANOTHER MORNING . . .
SOMETHING BUILT BY MEN — A LIVING PLACE PERHAPS.
A WATCHING EYE LIKE WE HAVE IN THE TUNNELS.

TAKE A COUPLE OF RETAINERS WITH YOU.
BETTER SPORT ON MY OWN, FATHER.

A PORTAL OPENED . . .
HOICK! HOICK!

ONE MAN, TWO HOUND BEASTS! WE MUST RUN.
YOU MAY RUN, LAD. I INTEND TO DOUBLE BACK ALONGSIDE OUR SCENT ROUTE.

SO I AM SPORT TO BE HUNTED WITH BEASTS! WELL, I SHALL MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR THEM.


HERE HE COMES!

YEEEARRRH!
WHAT — URGH!

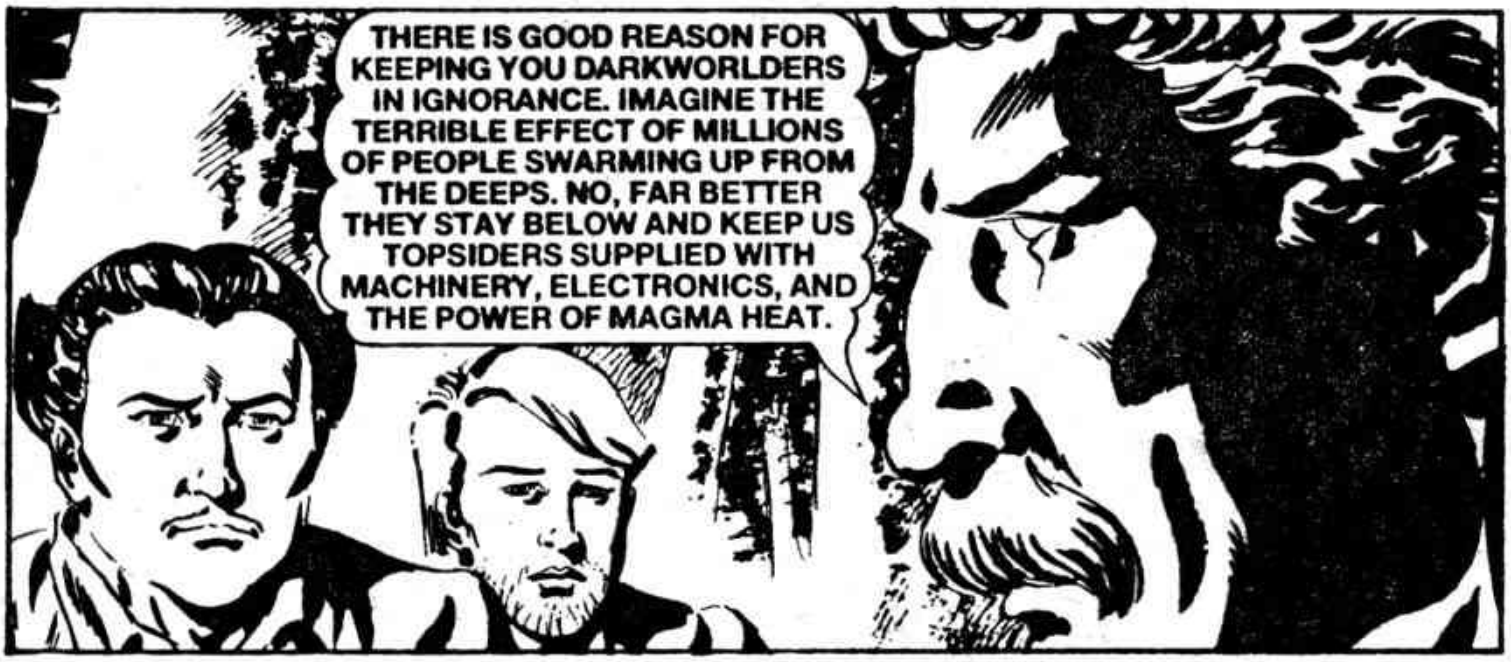
PITY I DON'T HAVE TIME TO LEARN THE WORKINGS OF THIS WEAPON.

THIS WAY WILL HAVE TO DO.

BUT MINGO WAS BOWLED OVER BY THE OTHER HOUND . . .

DORCAS APPEARED . . .
OBLIGED, LAD!
THE HUNTER RECOVERED—
CURSE YOU!
OH, NO — I'LL TAKE THIS LITTLE WEAPON.
ASSIST ME BACK TO THE STRONGHOLD AND I WILL SUGGEST YOU BOTH FOR SERVICE AS FAMILY RETAINERS.
I AM NO MAN'S SERVANT! HOW DO YOU TOPSIDERS SURVIVE IN THE RADIATION UP HERE?

THERE IS NO RADIATION EXCEPT FOR A FEW HOTSPOTS THAT WERE OLD CITIES. THE LAND CLEANSED ITSELF LONG AGO.
A CLEAN LAND, YET WE IN DARKWORLD ARE KEPT BELIEVING WE LIVE UNDER THE CRUST OF A CHARRED WORLD.

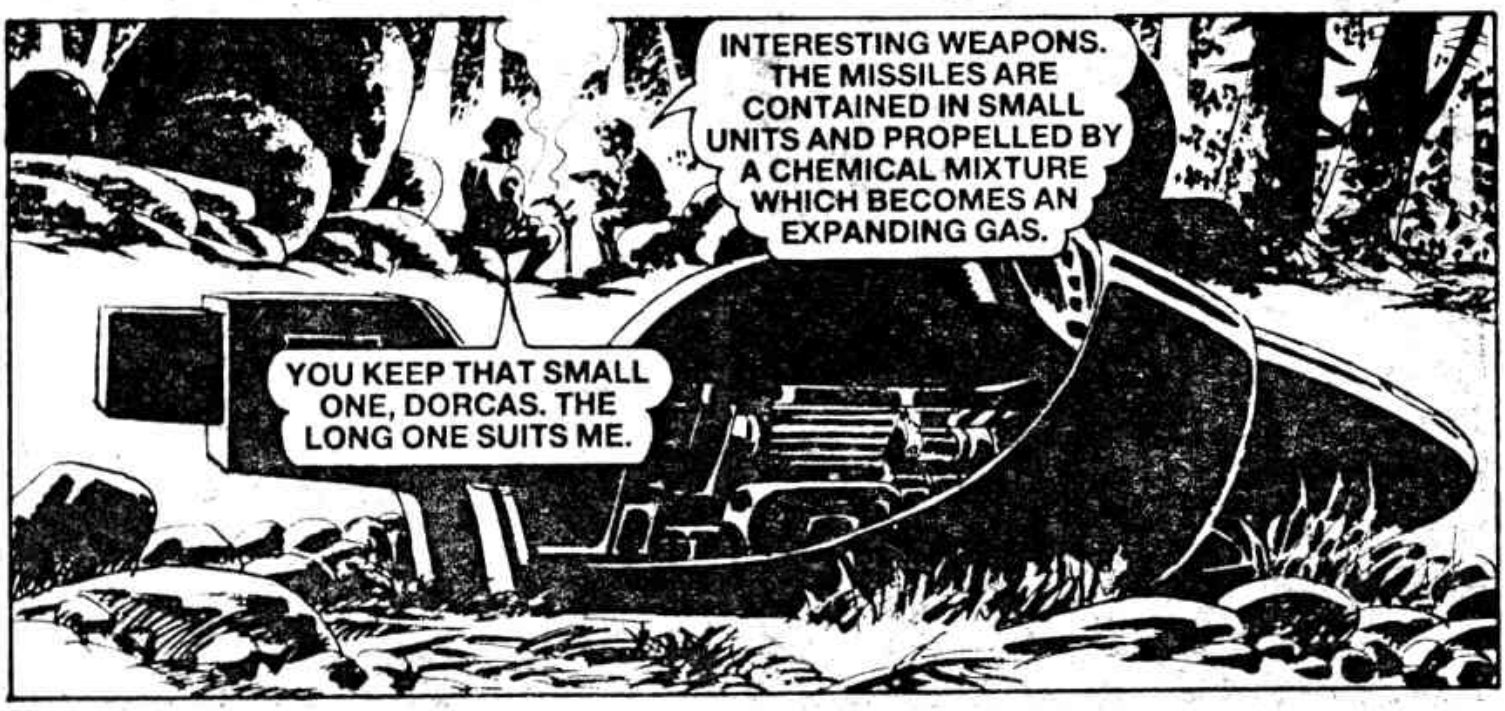

THERE IS GOOD REASON FOR KEEPING YOU DARKWORLDERS IN IGNORANCE. IMAGINE THE TERRIBLE EFFECT OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE SWARMING UP FROM THE DEEPS. NO, FAR BETTER THEY STAY BELOW AND KEEP US TOPSIDERS SUPPLIED WITH MACHINERY, ELECTRONICS, AND THE POWER OF MAGMA HEAT.

WHY ARE YOU REACHING INSIDE YOUR TUNIC?
ER . . . JUST SOMETHING I WANT TO SHOW YOU . . .

THE TOPSIDER PRODUCED ANOTHER GUN, BUT MINGO WAS TOO QUICK.
WH . . . WHAT?

THEY TOOK THE TOPSIDER'S HOV-BIKE—
NOW THEY'LL HUNT US DOWN AND KILL US.
THEY WERE DOING THAT ANYWAY.

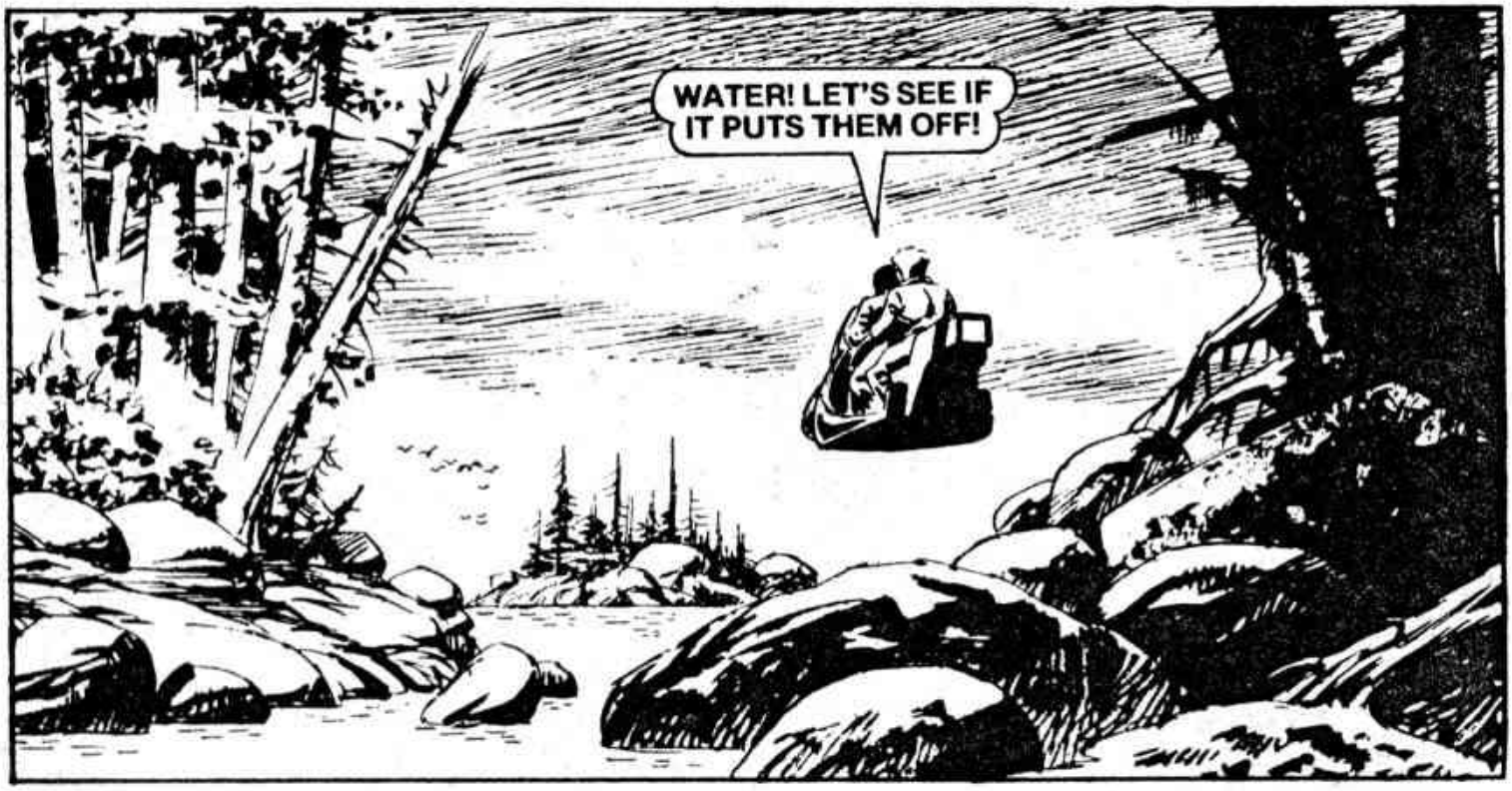
THE DAY PERIOD NEARED ITS END . . .
FOOD!


INTERESTING WEAPONS. THE MISSILES ARE CONTAINED IN SMALL UNITS AND PROPELLED BY A CHEMICAL MIXTURE WHICH BECOMES AN EXPANDING GAS.
YOU KEEP THAT SMALL ONE, DORCAS. THE LONG ONE SUITS ME.

DURING THE NEXT DAY PERIOD—
WHAT THE . . .
LOOK!

HUNTERS!

HOW COULD THEY FIND US? I SAW NO SMELL-HOUNDS AMONG THEM.


WATER! LET'S SEE IF IT PUTS THEM OFF!

THEY HID AMONG THE TREES—
I DON'T SEE THEM!

THERE . . . THEY COME!

MINGO! WHAT DO YOU DO?
I AM ABOUT TO MAKE THIS SPORT MORE INTERESTING.

MINGO FIRED HIS NEW WEAPON . . .

BACK! GO BACK!

NOW THOSE BOLD HUNTERS KNOW THIS GAME CAN BITE.
THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY PERIOD . . .
WE TWIST ABOUT AND HIDE — YET STILL THEY FOLLOW.
IT'S AS IF THEY KNOW EXACTLY WHERE WE ARE.
ONCE AGAIN THEY FLED . . .
WE WILL FIND A PLACE TO FACE THEM!

. . . AND THEY FLED INTO A TRAP!

MEN CAME FROM THE UNDERGROWTH . . .
STRUGGLE AND YOU DIE — OTHERWISE WE MEAN YOU NO HARM.

A SIGNAL BEACON! ALL HUNTER HOV-BIKES ARE FITTED WITH THEM.
SO THAT'S WHY WE COULDN'T SHAKE THEM.

YOU TWO ARE LUCKY WE SAW WHAT WAS GOING ON AND MANAGED TO GET AHEAD OF THE GAME.

THE ENLARGED PARTY TOOK TO HIDING . . .
THAT RIDERLESS BIKE WON'T FOOL THEM FOR LONG — BUT LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO GET AWAY.

SO YOU'RE DARKWORLDERS WHO WERE SENT UP LIKE MINGO AND ME.
DODGERS WHO ESCAPED THE HUNT — JUST SIX OF US. THERE MAY BE OTHERS SCATTERED ABOUT. THE TOPSIDERS STILL HUNT US, BUT WE'VE LEARNED TRICKS IN YEARS OF DODGING.

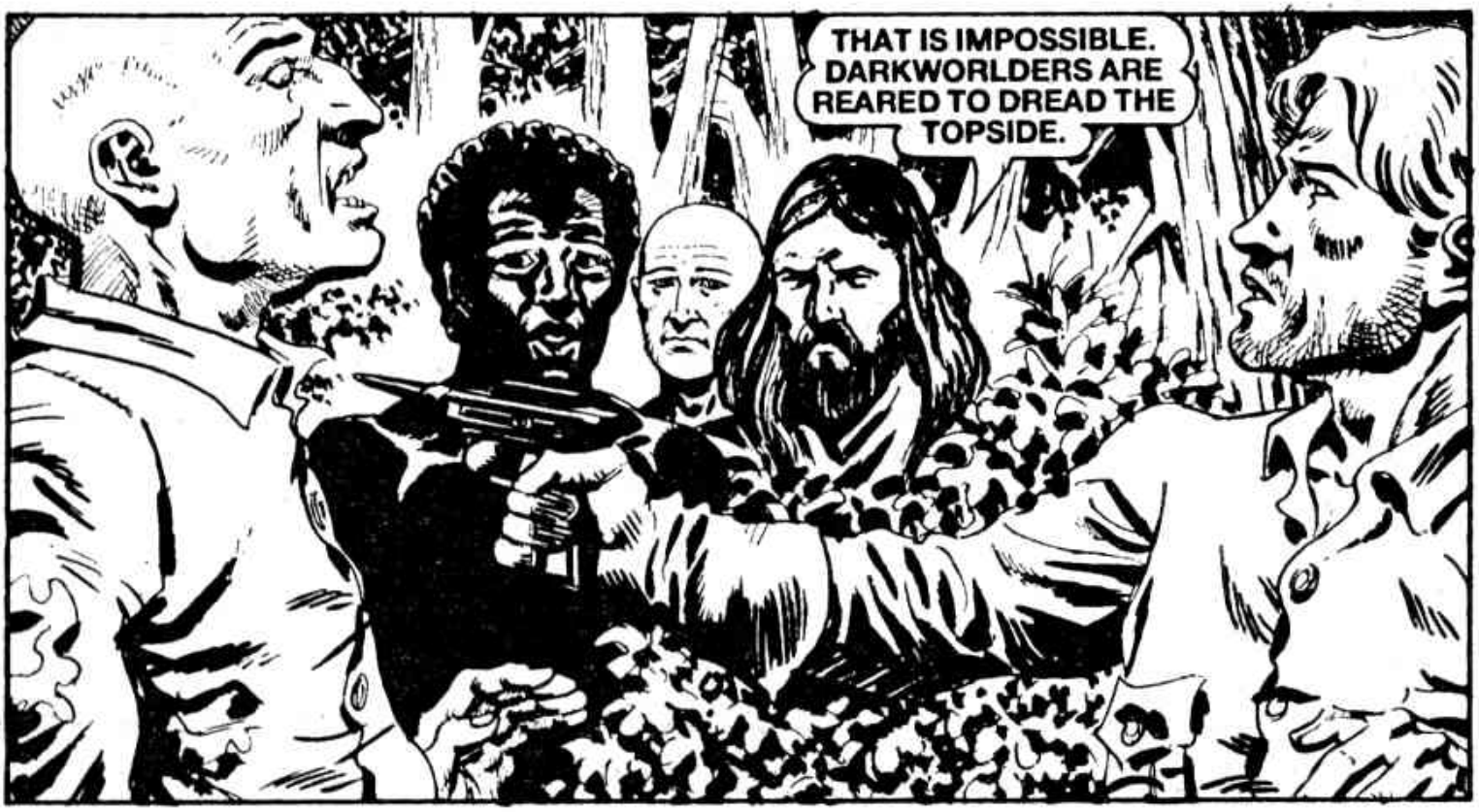
THERE'S THE REST OF US. JORG IS THE OLDEST — AND SMARTEST! HE'S STAYED ALIVE ON THE DODGE FOR OVER TEN YEARS.

JORGE, TWO NEW FRIENDS, NAMES OF —

MINGO AND DORCAS. WE'VE BEEN LISTENING ON OUR LOOTED RADIO TO THE ESTATE NET BUZZING NEWS OF THEM AND THEIR KILLING OF TWO TOPSIDERS, ONE THE SON OF A SQUIRE.

THIS!

SMART OF YOU TO HIDE THE LITTLE WEAPON, DORCAS. NOW LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
NO! I WANT TO PUT AN IDEA TO THESE DODGERS. WHAT IF WE COULD EMPTY THE CITY — BRING EVERYBODY UP TO THE SURFACE?


THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE. DARKWORLDERS ARE REARED TO DREAD THE TOPSIDE.

THAT'S THE CRAZIEST NOTION I EVER HEARD.
IT CERTAINLY IS — BUT WHAT IF IT COULD BE DONE? FELLOW DODGERS, I RECKON WE SHOULD TALK.

THE DODGERS TALKED . . .
HE'S RIGHT ABOUT YOUR IDEA BEING CRAZY. HOW COULD WE EVER GET BACK TO DARKWORLD?
I'M THINKING OF THAT OLD MINE WE FOUND. IT'S POSSIBLE TO FIND THE ENTRANCE.

FRIENDS, WE LIVE WITHOUT HOPE, HUNTED LIKE WILD ANIMALS — JUST DEAD MEN WAITING TO DIE. YOUR CRAZY IDEA AT LEAST GIVES US SOME CHANCE!
SO WE'RE WITH YOU.
THE DODGERS MOVED OUT AT THE START OF THE NEXT DAY PERIOD . . .
THE THIRD PARTY WE'VE SEEN. THOSE KILLINGS HAVE REALLY STIRRED THEM UP.

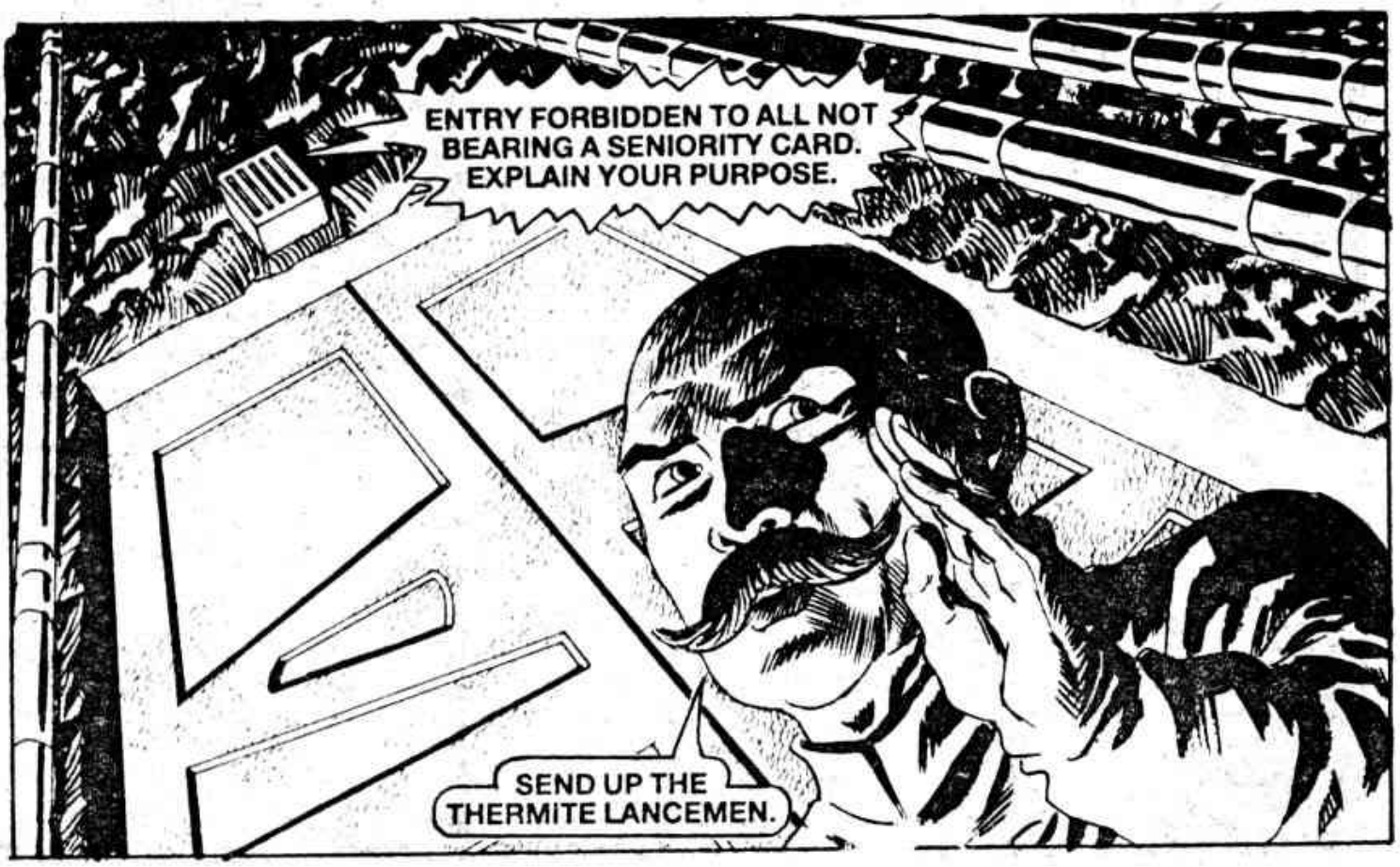
THIS IS IT! THESE ARE THE MARKS OF OUR WORM WHEN IT BROKE OUT THAT DAY.
WE'LL NEED LIGHT — TWISTS OF DRY GROWTH GIVING OUT MORE FLAME THAN SMOKE.

MINGO AND DORCAS TOOK THE LEAD . . .
THE BREACH — AND STILL OPEN.
NOT FOR LONG! THESE ARE FRESH SHOT-HOLES FOR BLASTING.

FURTHER DOWN THE SHAFT—
THIS IS REAL LUCK. OUR OLD MATES OF PATHFINDER TEAM 932.
SHADES OF — NO, IT ISN'T POSSIBLE FOR EVEN A GHOST TO BE THAT UGLY. MINGO! YOU'RE ALIVE.
JUST ABOUT, GAFFIR. I'VE GOT QUITE A STORY TO TELL YOU AND THE LADS.
MINGO TALKED — GAFFIR AND OTHERS LISTENED.
SO TOPSIDE IS A LUSH GREEN WORLD, EH! LAD, YOU KNOW THAT ISN'T POSSIBLE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT GAME YOU AND THOSE GUYS ARE PLAYING, BUT I HAVE TO REPORT IN ON YOU.
SURE, GAFFIR — ONLY FIRST TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT I'M HOLDING.

THEY'RE CALLED FLOWERS, GAFFIR — A SMALL PART OF THE FLORA GROWING EVERYWHERE TOPSIDE.
HUH! I NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE THEM. HEY, THEY'RE KIND OF SCENTED.
LADS, WE'VE BEEN LIVING A BIG LIE ALL OUR LIVES. QUESTION IS — WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

THE GAFFIR IMPROVED ON DORCAS'S PLAN . . .
CENTRAL CONTROL IS THE PLACE. FROM THERE WE CAN NOT ONLY CRACK THE VALVES, BUT STOP THE MAIN COMPUTER CLOSING DOWN EVERY LEVEL OF THE CITY.


ENTRY FORBIDDEN TO ALL NOT BEARING A SENIORITY CARD. EXPLAIN YOUR PURPOSE.
SEND UP THE THERMITE LANCEMEN.

CEASE WHAT YOU ARE DOING. THIS IS AN ORDER. SECURITY IS BEING ADVISED.
IN WE GO, LADS.
ARE YOU MAD? OH — THIS IS MOST IRREGULAR.
ISN'T IT JUST? GET BUSY, LADS.

WRECK EVERY DAMPER FOR THE MAGMA TUBE! HIT THE MAIN COMPUTER AND BACK-UPS!
DON'T YOU REALISE THE HARM YOU DO? IN THIRTY HOURS THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE WILL BE INCINERATED BY THE BUILD-UP OF MAGMA HEAT.
...
ONLY IF THEY'RE HERE WHEN IT HAPPENS — WHICH IS WHY MY LADS HAVEN'T TAMPERED WITH THE INTERCOM SYSTEM.

CALLING ALL CITIZENS. THE CITY IS ABOUT TO PERISH. YOU CAN PERISH WITH IT — OR YOU CAN GO UP AND OUT INTO A CLEAN AND PLEASANT WORLD. I SAY AGAIN . . .

GET OUT OR PERISH! MAKE FOR THE MAIN RAMPS — OR WAIT TO BECOME ASH WHEN MAGMA HEAT BURNS UP THROUGH ALL LEVELS.

IT'S WORKING! EVERY RAMP ON EVERY LEVEL PACKED WITH PEOPLE MOVING UPWARDS.
THERE'S AN EASIER WAY FOR US. WE CAN USE THE CONTROL CENTRE ELEVATOR.
NEARING TOP LEVEL.
BLASTERS ON STUN!

CHAR-R-R-R-
R-R-RGE!

THIS IS
THE WAY.

LADS, MEET THE DEPUTY. HE'S THE NICE PERSON WHO INTRODUCED US TO TOPSIDE SPORT.
LOOK! PEOPLE ARE TRAPPED.
THAT'S YOUR FAULT! THE EXITS ARE JAMMED BECAUSE OF YOU SABOTAGING THE COMPUTER.
DEPUTY, YOU HAVE TO A COUNT OF FIVE TO UNJAM THOSE EXITS. ONE-TWO-THREE —
WAIT! THERE SHOULD BE AN EMERGENCY RELEASE ON MY PERSONAL CONSOLE.

IT'S OPENING! I SEE LIGHT.

LIGHT!

THE DARKWORLD PEOPLE CAME BACK TO THE EARTH . . .
AHHHHHHHHHHHH! LIGHT . . . SUNLIGHT!
YOU HAVE DONE A TERRIBLE THING. MILLIONS OF PEOPLE LET LOOSE ON AN UNPREPARED WORLD CAN LEAD ONLY TO CHAOS AND SUFFERING.
PERHAPS . . . BUT YOUR WAY WAS WORSE! YOU CAN'T COOP PEOPLE UP AND FEED THEM LIES. THEY MUST BE FREE!
A PRESENT FOR YOU, DEPUTY. IT'S CALLED A FLOWER.

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Which is your favourite science fiction movie? _____

_____

Have you any comments to make about STARBLAZER. . . good or bad? _____

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DARKWORLD

Driven underground during the nuclear wars, man had survived five hundred years in an environment devoid of sunlight, rain, wind, flowers and animals. Up above, amongst the radiation-lashed ruins of civilisation, nothing stirred, so the monitors reported. Earth's surface was a sterile, barren, uninhabitable waste. Or was it?